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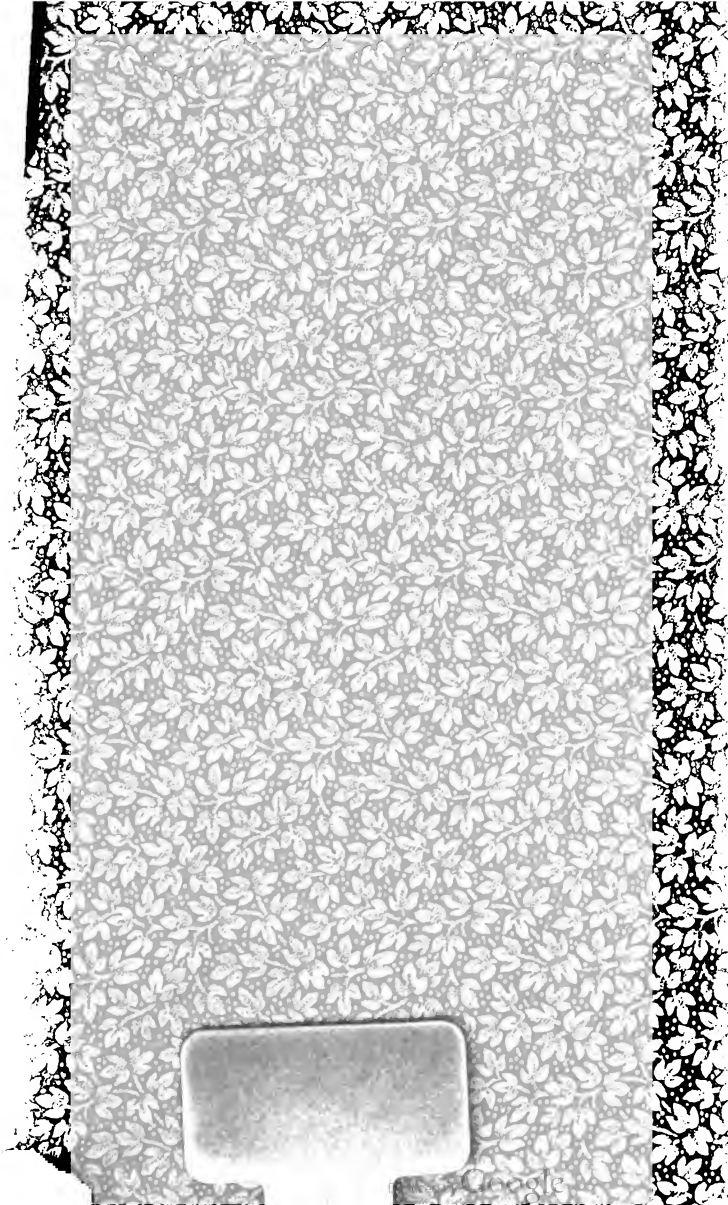
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Father Placid: or, The custodian of the blessed sacrament

Laetitia Selwyn
Oliver

**Father Placid:
or, The
custodian of
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FATHER PLACID.

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OR,

The Custodian of the Blessed Sacrament.

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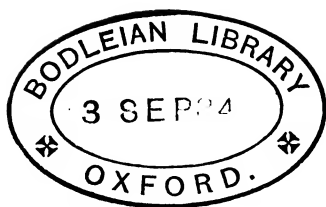
LÆTITIA OLIVER,

AUTHOR OF 'ROSE FORTESCUE, OR THE DEVOUT CLIENT OF OUR LADY
OF DOLOURS.'



R. WASHBOURNE,
18 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1884.

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FATHER PLACID;

OR,

The Custodian of the Blessed Sacrament.



CHAPTER I.

ONE bright morning in September, about the year 1835, a numerous party were assembled at the hospitable board of Sir Herbert Vyvyan, at Trevayler Hall, not many miles from the little village of Pendeen, in Cornwall. Whilst breakfast is progressing, we will take a look at the different persons who surround the well-spread table.

The first to engage our attention is

the worthy host, a tall grey-haired man, who has passed some sixty summers or more, the very personification of the good old English baronet; an affectionate husband, a kind landlord, and a genial host. The last of his race, he prides himself in having descended in an unbroken line from a certain Sir Ranald de Vyvyane, who came over with the Conqueror. He has but one grief, which is that he has no heir to whom to bequeath his name and estates; for, though he has been married sixteen years, no child has blessed his union.

Next to him sits an ancient dame of nearly ninety years—his mother—who still retains her faculties unimpaired, and continues to take the liveliest interest in all that goes on around her. Sir Hubert, in her eyes, is still a child; he shows her the greatest respect, and obeys her slightest wish as if it were a command.

Opposite to her husband sits Lady

Vyvyan ; she is still young and beautiful, but to a close observer there is a very world of melancholy in those deep blue eyes, and there are lines on her fair brow which are not caused by age or pain. There are rumours that she has always looked unhappy since she came to Trevayler, but none can guess the cause. Her niece, a young girl of eighteen, has just taken her place at Lady Vyvyan's left hand, and her raven locks, dark eyes, and rich brown complexion, present a strong contrast to the Saxon beauty of her aunt.

Gertrude Leslie was the only child of Lady Vyvyan's brother ; her mother, an Italian, had reared her in the ancient faith, and on the death of both her parents she had been sent to a convent for her education, which being completed, Sir Hubert had offered her a home, which she had gladly accepted on receiving the assurance that she should

have full liberty to practise her religion. Before she had been at the Hall three months she had won the affection of all the family.

Opposite to her is Everard Neville. As he is the hero of our little tale, we must take a closer look at him than at the others ; he is about seven-and-twenty, of middle height and well-proportioned ; his forehead is high and broad, his grey eyes quick and intelligent, his finely cut mouth is firm, but it can occasionally relax into a smile of great sweetness. His character is easily read ; he is clever, prudent, persevering and warm-hearted.

Everard Neville was the son of a very wealthy man, the rector of a large parish in the north of England ; educated at Eton, he was early sent to Oxford, where he distinguished himself greatly ; he aspired to the Bar, and studied for that profession. Fortune seemed to smile on him : he had wealth at his

command, and he was engaged to a fascinating young girl, to whom he was much attached. Three years previous to the opening of our story, doubts as to the faith he had been brought up in suddenly beset him; he tried to drown them in hard study, but they continued to sound like a trumpet in his ears. After a protracted struggle of some months he yielded to the call of grace and was received into the Catholic Church.

What followed was the usual result of such a step: the gay world turned its back upon him; the religious world cast him off, and called him a 'pervert;' his father disinherited and closed his doors against him; his *fiancée* broke off her engagement, and his best friends forsook him.

Without money and without friends, he was no longer able to prosecute his studies, and at last accepted a situation as foreign correspondent in a well-known

London firm. His employers soon learned to esteem and respect the hard-working young man, and at the end of two years they raised his salary, and did all in their power to render his situation as little irksome as possible.

One of the very few friends who remained true to Everard was Sir Hubert Vyvyan, and it was a most pressing invitation from the friendly baronet that had brought him down to the Hall for the first time.

Next to Gertrude Leslie sat Dr. Lowther, the Protestant Rector of the parish, and his High Church Curate ; his wife and daughter were also present, as well as a Colonel Garrett and three or four officers quartered at the neighbouring seaport town.

‘ This is your first visit to this part of the country, is it not ? ’ said Dr. Lowther to Everard.

‘ Indeed it is, ’ he answered ; ‘ and I

am delighted with the little I have already seen during my drive from Truro yesterday; I was quite unprepared for such wild and beautiful scenery.'

'Wait till you have been here a week, and see if you will not rave about its charms!' said Lady Vyvyan. 'Old Adams drove you, I suppose?' she continued.

'He did; and kept me amused the whole way with his tales of ancient times. By-the-bye, Sir Hubert, he informed me that there was a haunted chamber here at the Hall. Is it true?'

'A haunted chamber!' exclaimed several voices; 'how very interesting—we must all see it!'

'I shall be most happy to gratify your wishes,' answered Sir Hubert, 'and will conduct those who care to see it whenever they wish.'

'Is it really supposed to be haunted?' asked Colonel Garrett of Lady Vyvyan.

‘Yes,’ she replied with a shudder; ‘it has always had a bad name; no one has ever been induced to sleep in it for two hundred years or more, except one servant, who came out half-crazed and never entirely recovered his senses: that was in the time of Sir Hubert’s grandfather.’

‘What was it he imagined he had seen?’ asked Everard.

‘I do not really know—he was too shaky to give any detailed account; but from time to time for two centuries various persons have declared that they saw an old man in the passage leading to the room.’

‘Did he ever speak to any of them?’ asked Mrs. Lowther.

‘No, I think not.’

‘When was he last seen?’ asked several at once.

‘The day I came of age,’ answered Sir Hubert; ‘now nearly forty years

ago. I used to be very proud of our ghost,' he continued, 'till I became acquainted with its real history. I was turning over some old papers one day when I came upon a document giving an account of the murder of a Popish priest, said to have been a Benedictine monk, in that very room. My great-great-grand-uncle was then a middle-aged man, unmarried, living a very retired life, as most Catholics did in those troublous days, for at that time none of the Vyvyans had conformed to the State religion countenanced by the so-called Good Queen Bess. His brother Richard, the younger by twenty years, lived with him, and was acknowledged by him as his heir. About the year 1600, shelter was given to a Benedictine monk, known as Father Placid, who remained here in safety for several months, when the younger Vyvyan betrayed the secret of his hiding-place to the Crown for gold, and

himself conducted a band of ruffians to the oak chamber, as it was then called. Here, before the servile ministers of justice could arrest their prisoner, yielding to a sudden fit of passion, he stabbed the good monk to death with his own hands. The priest met his fate with the courage and sweetness of the martyrs of old times, crying out, like St. Stephen, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The marks of his blood may yet be seen on the floor, though much pains have been taken to efface them. His body was thrown into a cart preparatory to being taken off to Truro, where no doubt it would have been treated with the usual ignominy; but Providence ordered otherwise, and whilst a drunken carousal was kept up by the murderers, some pious servants boldly carried away the body and gave it hasty burial at the foot of an old oak in a wood near at hand, in the pious hope of transferring it to con-

secrated ground in happier times. My great-great-grand-uncle was thrown into prison for harbouring a priest, but effecting his escape, died in poverty abroad, whilst his unworthy brother, professing the deepest devotion to the Protestant religion, took possession of the broad lands and estate of Trevayler. He married late in life, and for many years he prospered; but punishment overtook him at last, and he died raving mad in the very room where the murder was committed. Since then the place has always been called the "haunted chamber."

'What a horrid wretch that Richard Vyvyan was!' said Gertrude.

'I have no reason to feel proud of him as an ancestor, I assure you,' said Sir Hubert; 'and as to my wife, she always says that a curse rests on the Hall and the family since.'

Lady Vyvyan raised her melancholy

eyes with a look of pain to her husband's face as she answered :

‘ A curse which can only be averted in one way, Hubert.’

‘ Does the old oak-tree still exist ?’ asked Everard.

‘ It does,’ answered the baronet ; ‘ it is on a little mound where four paths meet ; an old cross used to stand there, but only a portion remains ; in my grandfather’s days the poor people about still called it “ the Priest’s Oak,” so firmly had the tradition imprinted itself on their minds.’

The breakfast being over, the company dispersed, after fixing the hour for a visit to the haunted room. The only two who lingered behind were Gertrude and Everard.

‘ Do you think,’ said the latter, ‘ that your uncle would object to my spending the night in that room ?’

‘ What objection could he make, Mr.

Neville, if you desire it ?' she answered ;
' but what is the motive of your wish ?'

' I scarcely know,' he said ; ' but since I heard the story, a strong and overwhelming desire to pass the night alone there has entirely mastered me. Somehow I fancy that the old man who has appeared is a poor soul in pain seeking relief, and unable to attain it till some living fellow Christian takes pity on it ; or, again, it may be some troubled spirit anxious to disclose some secret which prevents its enjoyment of eternal bliss. If some Catholic were to give it an opportunity it might still appear and speak.'

' I am so glad you feel thus,' answered his young companion ; ' I am of the same opinion as yourself as regards this apparition. I wish you all success with my uncle. Farewell for the present.'

CHAPTER II.

At the appointed time all the company met in the hall, where they were speedily joined by their worthy host, who conducted them to a part of the house hitherto unknown to them. They passed through long low rooms hung with faded tapestry, or with curious portraits in fashions long out of date, up winding staircases, lighted by narrow windows covered with cobwebs, through long, dark, narrow passages musty and gloomy, till they came to a heavy wooden door.

‘This is the room,’ said the baronet ; and taking a large and rusty key, he turned the lock, opened it, and walked in, followed by his guests.

It was a large and lofty apartment, wainscoted with oak panels curiously sculptured and black with age. An immense fireplace, with a finely carved

chimney-piece, faced the door ; over it hung an ancient portrait of a man in the prime of life. To the right were two large windows, between them an old-fashioned wardrobe ; to the left, in a deep recess, stood an immense bed, hung with faded yellow damask ; a few dilapidated chairs and a broken table completed the furniture, which, as well as the floor, was thickly coated with dust. Cobwebs hung from the walls, and the damp musty smell of a room long untenanted pervaded the place ; the panes of glass rattled in the windows as the driving rain fell upon them. The room was dismal and oppressive ; most of the guests, feeling the influence of the place, spoke low among themselves.

‘ This is where he fell,’ said Gertrude, pointing to a deep brown stain on the boards in the middle of the room ; and she murmured softly to herself, ‘ Holy Martyr, pray for us !’

‘Sir Hubert,’ said Everard, ‘may I sleep two or three nights here?’

‘Here?’ said his friend, looking very much astonished; ‘why, you will go mad. No one has dared to sleep here for many years.’

‘But I dare,’ answered Everard, smiling. ‘I am in earnest, Sir Hubert; in fact, I have set my heart on it. I am sure you will not raise any objection.’

‘You will catch cold, Mr. Neville,’ said Lady Vyvyan; ‘the room is horribly damp, and one or two panes of glass are broken. You must think better of it.’

‘Not I,’ he answered; ‘I shall do very well, and sleep as well here as in my usual bed.’

‘I expect the place is overrun with rats,’ remarked Colonel Garrett. ‘You will have a very disturbed night, leaving aside the unpleasant possibility of ghostly visitors.’

‘I fear neither rats nor ghosts,’ re-

plied Everard, 'and am prepared for an encounter with either. I do not see why a man with a good conscience should not pass as quiet a night here as elsewhere. Who does the portrait represent, Lady Vyvyan?'

'Sir Hubert's renegade ancestor,' she replied. 'I banished it some time ago from the gallery downstairs, and my husband caused it to be placed here. I wish he would allow me to destroy it altogether.'

'I certainly think it is out of place here, on the scene of his victim's glorious martyrdom,' said Everard.

When every object in the room had been thoroughly inspected, and the subject of supernatural apparitions generally had been duly discussed, most of the party, tired of the gloomy chamber and the horrors it suggested, left the room. Sir Hubert, Everard, and Gertrude alone remained.

‘Are you still in the same mind about sleeping here?’ asked Gertrude.

‘I am,’ he answered; ‘and intend doing so, with your uncle’s permission.’

‘You have my full sanction to do just what you like; only do not blame me for the consequences of your boldness, that is all I ask. A heavy cold, or a terrible dream, is the least you can expect. I am not a superstitious man, Everard,’ he continued, laying his hand kindly on the young man’s shoulder, ‘but the fact is, I feel decidedly uncomfortable about the past apparitions, and I cannot help fancying that this being the first time a Catholic has ever slept here since the murder, that something strange will happen. It is a ridiculous idea, I confess, but I cannot banish it.’

‘I hope to do the right thing, with the grace of God, whatever happens,’ replied Everard. ‘Who knows but good

may come out of all this? The Divine Providence orders all things, therefore it was not by chance that I came to the Hall; it was foreseen and preordained, no doubt for some wise end, at present hidden from us.'

'A fire shall be lit at once,' said Gertrude, 'and everything done to make the room rather more comfortable for you.'

'Let as little be done as possible,' said Everard; 'this room was good enough for a martyr to die in, therefore it is quite good enough for me to sleep in. A fire, even, is more than I really need; but, as the place is damp, I suppose I must submit.'

The three then slowly left the ghastly chamber, Everard deep in thought, and pondering over the line of conduct he should adopt in case some spirit from the other world should visit him that night.

CHAPTER III.

NIGHT had come ; the great clock on the stairs had just chimed the quarter-past eleven when Everard took possession of the haunted room.

Sir Hubert and several of the guests had accompanied him to the door ; they had joked with and laughed at him, wished him a merry time of it, and finally had bidden him good-night.

The passages no longer echoed with their cheerful voices and light footsteps. Everard was alone, and the dreadful stillness around him made him realize to the full his entire isolation. He was alone in the haunted room ; but no—not quite alone—God was there guarding and protecting him, and his good angel was by his side, though he felt not his nearness. Thick curtains veiled the windows to exclude the draught, and a huge fire burnt in the open grate, enough

to roast an ox, and two large wax candles stood on the table ; but no light of fire or candle could make that room less gloomy ; nay, rather, it appeared more dreadful and more sad than it had done by daylight, a few hours before. The west wind whistled more dismally through the broken panes, and even the rustling of the leaves and the creaking of the branches of the old elm-tree outside sounded like the sobbing of some unquiet spirit. The damp smell in the room made it appear almost like a vast grave.

Everard fell into a train of melancholy thoughts, which he endeavoured to banish by making devoutly the sign of the Cross ; then kneeling down, he humbly recited his night prayers, ending with the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and the invocation, ‘All ye holy English Martyrs pray for us !’

He had scarcely finished when the great clock struck twelve slowly and

solemnly ; the last echo had not ceased to strike the ear when there was a strange movement in the room, the yellow hangings of the old bed waved to and fro, as if set in motion by some unseen hand, the ancient portrait even seemed, to Everard, for the moment indued with life, as the firelight flickered strangely upon it, and softly along the passage outside came the sound of footsteps approaching nearer and nearer.

At last they stopped apparently at the door, the handle turned gently in the lock, there was a moment of fearful suspense. Brave as he was, Everard trembled and turned pale ; there was *that* on the threshold which filled him with terror. The door opened slowly, and the form of a venerable old man was seen standing in the doorway. An old man attired in sable garments, fashioned in the costume of a century long past ; his silvery grey hair, falling nearly to his

shoulders, shaded a pale and emaciated countenance, at once mild and dignified. He gazed at Everard with a sad and wistful air, and beckoned slowly with his withered hand.

Our hero paused for a moment, then with a vigorous effort he roused his drooping courage, and advanced to meet the mysterious stranger. The phantom of the night, however, did not await his approach, but, turning, glided from the room, followed by the young man, who had hastily snatched up a candle as he passed out. Preceded by his strange guide, he went up the passage and down a long stone staircase, when a sudden gust of wind extinguished the light; he was left in darkness, save for the pale beams of the moon constantly obscured by passing clouds.

A sudden panic seized him; he turned and fled. How he got back, he knew not; but at last he found himself once

more in the chamber of horrors. Worn out with the excitement he had undergone, the young man threw himself on the bed, and after tossing to and fro for some hours, he fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

At an advanced hour the following morning, the bright beams of a September sun roused our hero from his slumbers. He sat up in bed, trying to remember where he was, and what had happened the previous night. Gradually the whole of his midnight adventure returned to his memory.

‘Was it a dream?’ he thought to himself, ‘or a delusion of the brain, or a snare of the evil one? Did I really see and follow that mysterious old man? and if I did, who and what is he? For what purpose does this troubled spirit

haunt this place ? Is it the soul of that unhappy renegade, whose portrait I have before me, anxious to atone in some way for his crime ; or to reveal some secret which affects greatly the honour of the noble family whose guest I am ; or could it be the spirit of the Martyr Priest, whose blood still stains these boards at my feet ? Might it not more probably be the soul of some poor Catholic in Purgatory, eager for Masses, in order to hasten its flight to the realms of bliss above ? Shame on my cowardice ! A little more boldness, and the mystery would have been most certainly revealed ; at least, if my unknown friend again returns, I will confront him with more courage ; armed with the crucifix, and invoking the holy English Martyrs, I will fear nothing, and I will not rest till I have learned the secret of this nocturnal visitation.'

Springing from his bed, he began the

necessary duties of the toilet with inconceivable rapidity, as he observed that the breakfast-bell must long since have sounded unheeded. A very few moments sufficed, and he descended to the breakfast-room, where he was greeted with a round of jokes and questions—one begging to know if he had made acquaintance with the ghost; another, if the old gentleman from the fiery regions below had paid him a visit; several declaring they were quite sure the whole story of the murder and the apparitions was an invention of the Papists, always anxious to pose as martyrs.

Everard, with a great effort, joined in the conversation whilst disposing of a hearty meal, but with his usual prudence carefully avoided any allusion to his midnight adventure, determined to keep his own counsel for the present.

Sir Hubert, his wife and niece, alone did not exhibit any curiosity on the

subject ; perhaps with these three there was some lurking suspicion that something had been seen, but they judged it the wisest course not to press their guest on the subject.

Later in the day, Everard set out for a solitary stroll through the grounds, refusing with courtesy the offer of one or two of the officers to accompany him. He had an object in view, and that object could be best attained if alone : he was bent on a visit to the ' Priest's Oak.'

A few minutes' walk across the park brought him to a small iron gate, which gave access to a narrow lane, shut in between deep rocky banks covered with rich purple heather, pink foxgloves, and golden-coloured furze. About a quarter of a mile further the lane ended in a rough wooden bridge spanning a narrow stream, which, foaming and gurgling, fell over a ledge of granite rock, forming a

miniature waterfall just below the bridge, and then hurried on among ferns and flowers to join the great wide sea a mile away. The sky was without a cloud ; it was one of those warm bright days so often met with early in autumn, and Everard walked along, drinking in the calm rural beauty of the scenery : the soft west wind fanned his cheek ; the babbling of the little brook at his feet, the distant roar of the sea as it thundered on the ironbound coast, and the cawing of the rooks overhead, made sweet music to his ears.

Once across the brook, the wood was close at hand ; he chose a soft, green, mossy path to the left, which speedily conducted him to the place he sought.

The ‘Priest’s Oak,’ a gigantic tree, gnarled and twisted, presented an appearance of great age, having scarcely a living branch left, and a huge cavity in its vast trunk would have easily sheltered

five or six men. It stood on a grassy mound, the centre where four paths met ; a block of granite, half-covered with moss, ivy, and grey lichen, lay at the foot of the tree, the only remains of the ancient cross which once had stood in the four ways and reminded the passers-by of the Passion and death of a God made Man.

If Everard had entertained any doubts as to whether he was at the right spot, they were soon dissipated, for on the mossy ground some pious hand had laid a crown of red and white roses. The young man knelt and kissed the earth.

‘Hail ! holy ground !’ he cried, ‘where repose the sacred ashes of one of England’s most heroic children. Hail ! martyr flower, whose blood was shed for Christ ! Holy priest, faithful religious, glorious martyr, your course is finished ; your conflict is over ; your trial has passed ; your crown is won ! You were faithful unto death, and now you enjoy

the reward of your labours. Crowned with the twofold diadem of Virginity and Martyrdom, you gaze for ever on the unveiled face of God, and are inebriated with that Divine Beauty which "eye hath not seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

'Blessed Martyr, from your bright throne, cast on us, your poor brethren, the Catholics of England, a glance of pity, and pray that we too may be faithful to that holy religion for which you laid down your life : intercede also for our benighted fellow-countrymen still wallowing in the mire of heresy and schism, that they, too, may return to the bosom of that Church in which alone salvation can be found, so that this little island may become once more the dowry of the Mother of God, and the land of Saints. Oh, English martyrs ! why are you so little known and so little loved ? Why is there so much devotion to a St.

Philip Neri, a St. Francis Xavier, or a St. Teresa, and so little to an Edmund Arrowsmith, a Robert Southwell, or a Margaret Clitherow? Your heroic lives equal if not surpass theirs; and you had the privilege of martyrdom, a grace which was not granted to them. Three hundred years have elapsed, and you, dear English Martyrs, have not yet been raised to the Altars of the Church. Alas! for our indifference and coldness to you, our martyred brethren, who spoke the same tongue, breathed the same air, trod on the same soil as ourselves.

‘Witness, great Saints, my firm resolve, that happen what may, go where I will, I will strive to my last breath to spread devotion to you, and to stir up some enthusiasm towards you in the cold hearts of men; and if God grant me the opportunity, I promise to devote money, time, and talents to the advancement of your cause at Rome.’

The young man rose, his face glowing with fervour, and resumed his walk through the woods, a sweet peace and serenity filling his soul as the bright Angels of God registered his vow in the eternal records.

CHAPTER V.

It was with the greatest impatience that Everard awaited the midnight hour in the haunted chamber. Great was his anxiety lest the stranger should not again appear ; but his fears were groundless, his anxiety was thrown away ; the last tone of the clock had not yet died away, when again the mysterious movement was heard in the room, the hangings of the bed again waved to and fro, and the footsteps of the unknown guest once more sounded along the gallery. The door flew open, and on the threshold stood the old man.

Everard, being less terrified, was able to survey him more calmly, and felt convinced that he was one calculated to excite more reverence and love than fear and dismay. His countenance wore the same melancholy expression, and he beckoned with his hand just as he had done on the previous night.

With his crucifix in his hand, Everard approached the stranger ; he fancied that the old man smiled as he drew near with the sign of Salvation uplifted, but he spoke not ; and turning round, preceded Everard down the gallery.

They went up passages and down staircases, and through many rooms unrecognised by Everard, till they came to a small narrow chamber paved with stone, the roof of which was supported by slender pillars of polished marble ; it was lighted by a solitary window, through which the moonbeams poured in all their glory, making it almost as bright as day.

Here the stranger paused, and Everard turned towards him, wondering what next would happen. The unknown pointed with its transparent hand to the stone at their feet. Everard bent down, and perceived that this stone differed in appearance from the rest of the pavement, and that in its centre was an iron ring; it was evident that the ghost desired the removal of this part of the pavement, for some reason best known to himself.

Everard was young and strong: he braced himself to the task, and commenced the work of uplifting the stone; but do what he would, he could not move that solid block one half inch; the sweat poured from his brow, and more than once he paused, faint and weary with his exertions; but each time that he did so his mysterious companion heaved a heavy sigh; and when our hero gazed into his face, as he stood

there silent and motionless, it seemed to grow more melancholy and sad. The kind heart of Everard throbbed with sympathy for the stranger's disappointment; again and again he tried, but it was all in vain; and again at each successive failure came that heavy sigh.

At last Everard broke the silence:

'It is of no use,' he said; 'I will return to-morrow with the proper tools.'

The stranger gravely bowed his head in silence, as if accepting Everard's offer, and disappeared just as the first bright streak of dawn broke through the casement.

Everard mechanically wended his way through the deserted passages, pondering over the strange scene which had just taken place, and forming in his mind the firm resolve to aid with all his power the venerable man who seemed to stand in so much need of help and assistance.

'If he had been a spirit of evil, the

crucifix would have put him to flight at once,' thought Everard; 'so I will proceed boldly, and leave the rest to God.'

CHAPTER VI.

THE third day of Everard's visit to the Hall passed slowly away; it seemed to him more like a year than a day, so anxious was he for the moment when the secret of those mysterious visits should be revealed. A sovereign judiciously bestowed on one of the men-servants had easily procured for him a pickaxe and other workmen's tools; and with these in his possession our hero entertained no doubts of his ability to raise the granite stone, which in his mind concealed some hidden treasure.

Night came at last: the birds retired to roost; weary man sought refuge from his cares in sleep; the stars began to

twinkle in the sky ; the moon shed her soft beams over the land, and Nature herself appeared to rest. Everard, too, retired to his chamber, but not to sleep ; for him there was no rest—he must toil and labour whilst others slumbered.

Midnight arrived, and with midnight the unknown friend with whom he had in so curious a way become acquainted. For the third time he silently followed the old man through the galleries, and once more set foot in the stone-paved chamber. The stone lay at their feet unmoved, and, as on the previous night, the moon alone diffused its silvery light around, and its soft radiance somewhat dispelled the gloom of that solitary place.

With a silent prayer, Everard resumes the work he had commenced so unsuccessfully before, the stranger standing by and watching every movement. After many fruitless efforts the stone begins to

be perceptibly loosened ; our hero, encouraged by this, labours with redoubled ardour and enthusiasm ; and, after an hour or two of heroic toil, the mass of granite yields to the superior skill of man. With almost supernatural strength he drags the stone from its position, and lays it on the ground.

Then eagerly he bends over the yawning cavity revealed beneath, but as he does so, he utters a low cry of wonder, and falls prostrate on the ground.

The secret of those midnight visits is suddenly revealed to him. At his feet lies a mass of treasure : vestments are there of cloth of gold and silver tissue, heavy with embroidery ; there are chalices of gold and ciboriums studded with precious gems ; and lastly, in a jewelled monstrance, the greatest treasure of all, that Pearl of great price, the *Blessed Sacrament* !

Everard bends low in profound adora-

tion before the Eucharistic God, hidden under the appearance of bread, so miraculously preserved in that lonely vault for so many long years. Then, turning, he gazes with wonder at the mysterious guardian of the Blessed Sacrament.

He is kneeling by Everard's side, with his hands crossed upon his breast, but oh, how transfigured! Every appearance of age has vanished; all traces of pallor and sadness have fled away, and a halo of light seems to surround his head; his eyes are fixed with an expression of burning love on the Blessed Sacrament, and he appears rapt in ecstasy. A Seraph before the throne of God could scarcely look more lovely, and the brightness of his face is so intense that it almost dazzles Everard's eyes.

Absorbed in the contemplation of God, his countenance reflects by turns all the Divine attributes; just as a translucent

mountain lake mirrors in its placid bosom the glittering splendour of the sun, the azure blue of the clear sky by day, the pale rays of the moon, and the twinkling stars by night.

Gazing on the countenance of the Martyr Priest, for surely it can be no other but he, Everard realizes for the first time the unutterable glory, majesty, and beauty of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and considers within himself,

‘If such be the servant, what then must the Divine Master of such a servant be?’

Those two kneel on, and hours go by; but those hours seem minutes to these privileged souls, and Everard dreads the moment when it must end. It comes at last; the light of day is breaking into that narrow sanctuary, and the bright citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem are recalling their companion to glory.

The Martyr Priest rises; for one moment he stands and casts a glance of tender love and gratitude on Everard; then, raising his sacred hand, he makes over him the sign of the Cross, and vanishes.

Everard weeps, for he knows that he shall see his face no more. The Saint's labour of love is over; he has been the faithful guardian and custodian of the Blessed Sacrament hitherto; he now bequeaths It to Everard, who understands that he is to continue that care till the Holy of Holies is in the hands of a priest.

Happy soul, to whom so sweet and sacred a legacy has been bequeathed! Let us leave him there, before Jesus in the Eucharist, striving to atone by acts of adoration and love for the neglect and base ingratitude of mankind towards the greatest of benefactors in this mystery of Divine tenderness.

CHAPTER VII.

EVERARD's protracted vigil did not allow him time for any repose. His anxiety as regards the sacred treasure entrusted to his care banished all desire for sleep. At an early hour he knocked at the door of Sir Hubert's dressing-room, and asked to see him for a few minutes.

On learning that the subject on which Everard proposed to confer was his midnight adventures in the haunted room, Sir Hubert led the way to the library, 'For,' said he, 'my wife and mother, to say nothing of Gertrude, are as anxious as myself to hear your experiences, and I will not deprive them of the pleasure of hearing them first from your own lips.'

So saying, he entered the room where Lady Vyvyan, Gertrude, and the old lady were already seated.

'Laura,' he said, 'Mr. Neville pro-

poses to relate all that he has seen during his *séjour* in the haunted room; we are all dying of curiosity, so I hope he will not keep us long in suspense.'

Everard gravely began his wonderful tale: in thrilling tones he described the first appearance of the old priest, and his own cowardice; he related the second mysterious visit of the same holy person—how he followed him into the stone-paved room, and his ineffectual efforts to raise the stone, accompanied by those deep sighs of disappointment from his companion. In accents of the deepest feeling, he described his third night's experience—the discovery of the Blessed Sacrament; the wondrous change in the old man by his side; his blessing and disappearance, and his own prolonged vigil through the night.

There was silence as Everard finished his story, broken at last by Lady Vyvyan.

‘Hubert,’ she cried, ‘I can resist no longer ; I must become a Catholic. For seventeen years I have fought against the grace of God, but I can continue the struggle no longer. Before my marriage I saw the truth of the Catholic religion, and resolved to embrace it ; I was instructed and prepared by an aged priest ; the day of my reception into the Church was even fixed. I met you, you proposed for my hand, and I accepted your offer. I feared you would not marry a Catholic wife ; I therefore concealed from you my intended change of faith, and I deferred my conversion. Year by year, as the desire to become a Catholic grew stronger, I tried harder and harder to stifle it ; at times I succeeded, but whenever I approached any way near the haunted room, those wishes revived with greater force than before. Oh, Hubert ! you will not cast me off, if I embrace the religion of your ancestors ?’

Sir Hubert was deeply moved, and, drawing her into his arms, said :

‘My own dear wife, if the Catholic religion will conduce in any way to your happiness, you have my full permission to embrace it; but oh! Laura, how much misery you might have spared yourself, if you had been open with me from the first. I surrounded you with all that wealth and love could give, yet I often saw the traces of secret tears on your cheeks; I would have sacrificed a fortune to have given you one moment’s pleasure, and still I saw you were not happy. Your change of religion will grieve me less than the strange reserve you have kept up with me till now. You have done very wrong in not having given me your confidence years ago.’

‘Forgive me, dearest,’ whispered Lady Vyvyan; ‘I am conscious that I have behaved badly both to God and man.’ Then, leaving her husband’s arms, she

knelt down by the side of the old lady, saying very sweetly, 'Mother, I shall not love you less when I become a Catholic ; will it make any difference to you ?'

The old lady embraced her affectionately.

'Child,' she said, 'it will make no difference between us. I am now on the very edge of the grave, and as I draw nearer and nearer to the tomb, I sometimes think of the words of the reformer Melancthon, "The Protestant religion is a good religion to live in, but the Catholic religion is the best to die in." I often feel I could do with more consolations than the religion I profess can afford.'

'Dear mother, we will become Catholics together,' murmured her daughter-in-law.

'And now, Everard, what do you propose doing ?' said Sir Hubert.

'I should like to send at once for the

Catholic priest, to remove the Blessed Sacrament,' he replied.

'It shall be done,' said his friend, ringing the bell as he spoke.

It was answered by a servant.

'Let a carriage be got ready at once,' said the baronet; 'and tell James to drive to the nearest Catholic Church and bring back the priest.'

'I hope, Mr. Neville,' said Gertrude, when the servant had left the room, 'that you will now conduct us to this hidden treasure.'

'With the greatest pleasure,' he answered; but, strange to relate, when he attempted to lead the way, his memory entirely failed him, and do what he would, he could not find the room he had left so short a time before. Up and down he wandered, till at last he gave up the attempt in despair, and the whole party were obliged to wait till the arrival of the priest.

After a weary interval of waiting, the carriage was seen returning ; Sir Hubert himself hurried down to receive the priest at the hall-door, and shaking him cordially by the hand, welcomed him to Trevayler ; he then conducted him to the library, and introduced him to Lady Vyvyan, and then to his mother, Gertrude, and Everard. Then, addressing our hero, he begged him to relate his wonderful tale once more.

For the second time Everard described the threefold appearance of the Martyr Priest and the discovery of the Blessed Sacrament in all its details, concluding with his own inability to find the entrance to the stone vault where such a treasure lay hidden.

Father La Roche, for such was the name of the French priest, long resident in England, was a prudent and sensible man ; he listened attentively to the whole story, without hazarding any

opinion as to the truth or falsehood of the young man's tale ; at the conclusion he said :

‘ Show me the haunted room.’

The whole party therefore adjourned to that gloomy chamber, which to most of them had lost all its horrors.

Arrived there, the priest surveyed the apartment, taking in everything with one glance of his keen penetrating eyes ; then he said :

‘ Pull out the bed.’

- Sir Hubert and Everard with difficulty removed that unwieldy piece of furniture.

Behind the bed, however, there was nothing but the old oak panelling which lined the entire room.

The priest stepped forward and carefully passed his hand over the carved wood.

‘ There will be a secret door here,’ he observed. ‘ I feel something like a spring ;’ and, even as he spoke, the

wood, obedient to his touch, glided back into the wall, and discovered a flight of steps, at the bottom of which a second door admitted them to the vault described by Everard.

There lay the stone he had raised with so much toil, and there before their eyes in that paved tomb, as once before in the Sepulchre hewn out of a rock in the Holy Land, lay the true Body of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

All knelt and adored their Redeemer and their God; then Sir Hubert whispered a word to the priest and left, accompanied by his wife and niece; there was a long pause, broken only by the return of the baronet.

The priest then rose and descended into the cave, and taking the Blessed Sacrament in his hands with all imaginable devotion and respect, returned slowly to the haunted room, followed by Sir Hubert and Everard.

The latter gave a start of gratified surprise as he entered.

Twelve men-servants stood ranged in a double row, bearing lighted candles, and Lady Vyvyan and Gertrude, their hands filled with the most costly flowers the hot-houses could produce, knelt ready to strew the way before the great Creator of those bright blossoms.

And so, with lights and flowers and every demonstration of respect and reverence, the Blessed Sacrament was once more carried through that house in which It had lived an unknown guest for more than two centuries.

At the hall-door stood Sir Hubert's newest carriage, drawn by the best horses his amply filled stable could supply, ready to convey the priest with his Divine Burden to his destination.

Everard accompanied Father La Roche to the church, and waited till he saw the Blessed Sacrament safe in the tabernacle;

then, with a conscience at peace, he gave thanks to God for having given him grace to fulfil the sacred duty bequeathed to him by the Martyr Priest.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIVE years have elapsed since the events related in the foregoing chapters took place, and since then great changes have taken place at Trevayler Hall.

Perhaps some of my readers may care to hear a little more of the different characters described in my simple tale, and for their benefit I add the concluding lines.

Three months after the removal of the Blessed Eucharist from the Hall, Sir Hubert, Lady Vyvyan, and the old lady embraced the religion of their ancestors, and were received into the Church. Their example was speedily followed by a number of their servants and tenants,

who had early become acquainted with the curious adventures in the haunted room.

The old lady did not long survive her change of faith, and died a most holy and edifying death in the arms of her son and daughter-in-law, assisted up till the last moment by Father La Roche.

A year later, Lady Vyvyan presented her delighted husband with a son and heir, who was held at the Baptismal font by Everard Neville and Gertrude Leslie, and received the name of Placid, in memory of him to whom they all owed so much. As in the course of another year two little brothers came to join the family circle, the house of Vyvyan seems at present to be in no danger of extinction.

The haunted chamber, haunted no longer, has been transformed into a beautiful Chapel, the high altar of which stands over the exact spot where the Martyr shed his blood. This Altar of

solid silver supports a tabernacle of the same costly material, a gem of beauty, being adorned within and without with Lady Vyvyan's jewels, which she obtained her husband's permission to sacrifice for that purpose, as an offering of gratitude for their conversion. The space behind the Altar is left open to afford access to the stone-paved vault, formerly the hiding-place of the Holy Eucharist, which remains just as it was five years ago, except that on each Maundy Thursday, filled with lights and flowers, it becomes once more the Sepulchre of the Blessed Sacrament.

Father La Roche has been established at the Hall as private chaplain for three years. His prudence, learning, and sanctity have secured for him the respect and esteem of the flock committed to his care, as his kindness, charity, and self-sacrificing zeal for their welfare have won their love.

The old oak-tree still stands under the canopy of heaven, and at its foot a beautiful granite cross now rears its lofty head. On the pedestal may be seen the following words :

‘ All ye holy English Martyrs pray for us.’

Gertrude Leslie, after a long sojourn at Trevayler Hall, went to try her vocation at the Carmelite Convent of Lanherne, and when last we heard of her, the white veil of the novice shaded her beauty from the bold gaze of man.

And what of Everard Neville ?—how has it fared with him since he slept in the once haunted chamber ?

For a year after his visit to the Hall, Everard continued in the employment of the same London firm ; at the end of that period he was summoned to his father’s dying bed, to receive from the pallid lips of his only remaining parent the full pardon of all the past, and a

father's blessing. On opening the will, dated three days previously, it was found that all the old Rector's wealth was bequeathed to Everard, without conditions of any kind.

The first use made by the young man of his large fortune, after paying off all his father's debts, was to build a small but beautiful church, dedicated to the Martyrs of England, in a poor and populous part of the county which had given him birth. This work achieved, he hastened to bend his steps towards Rome; and after a brief sojourn in the Eternal City, was received into the English College.

He has now been there three years, and his talents being of the highest order, his masters and professors look forward to a day when he will distinguish both himself and the College which has trained him. His piety is such, that even among his good and devout com-

panions he stands conspicuous, and he is known by the name of the 'pious student.'

But in his studies for the priesthood has he forgotten the English Martyrs? Far from it; the strange events of those three nights in the haunted room, and the vow he had made at the foot of the priest's oak, remain fresh in his memory, and time but adds stability to his firm resolve. Among his companions and friends he speaks continually of the English Martyrs, and by his pious words and still more pious example spreads devotion to them in season and out of season.

During his spare moments in the day, and during hours robbed from his sleep at night, he compiles and writes easy and popular lives of those same blessed Martyrs, intended for distribution among the lower classes in England. A large sum of money, invested by him before

his arrival in the Eternal City, ever remains intact, notwithstanding the calls on his charity; he gives, and gives largely, but this particular sum he will never touch; he calls it 'The Fund of the English Martyrs,' and it is intended for the advancement of their cause at Rome.

The last look we had at our hero was in the beautiful chapel of the English College. It was a feast day, and Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, exposed on high amidst a blaze of lights, received the homage of His faithful subjects.

Everard, too, was there, kneeling before the Altar, his eyes closed, his hands clasped; he seemed no longer on earth—absorbed in devotion, he appeared utterly oblivious of aught but the Divine King in His beauty before him. At that fountain of living waters he was slaking his thirst, and drinking in floods of love, light, and happiness.

There we will bid him farewell, there in that haven of peace we will leave him, preparing for that awful moment when pastoral hands will be uplifted over him, and those solemn words of holy Scripture will be fulfilled in his regard :

‘Tu es sacerdos in æternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.’

THE END.

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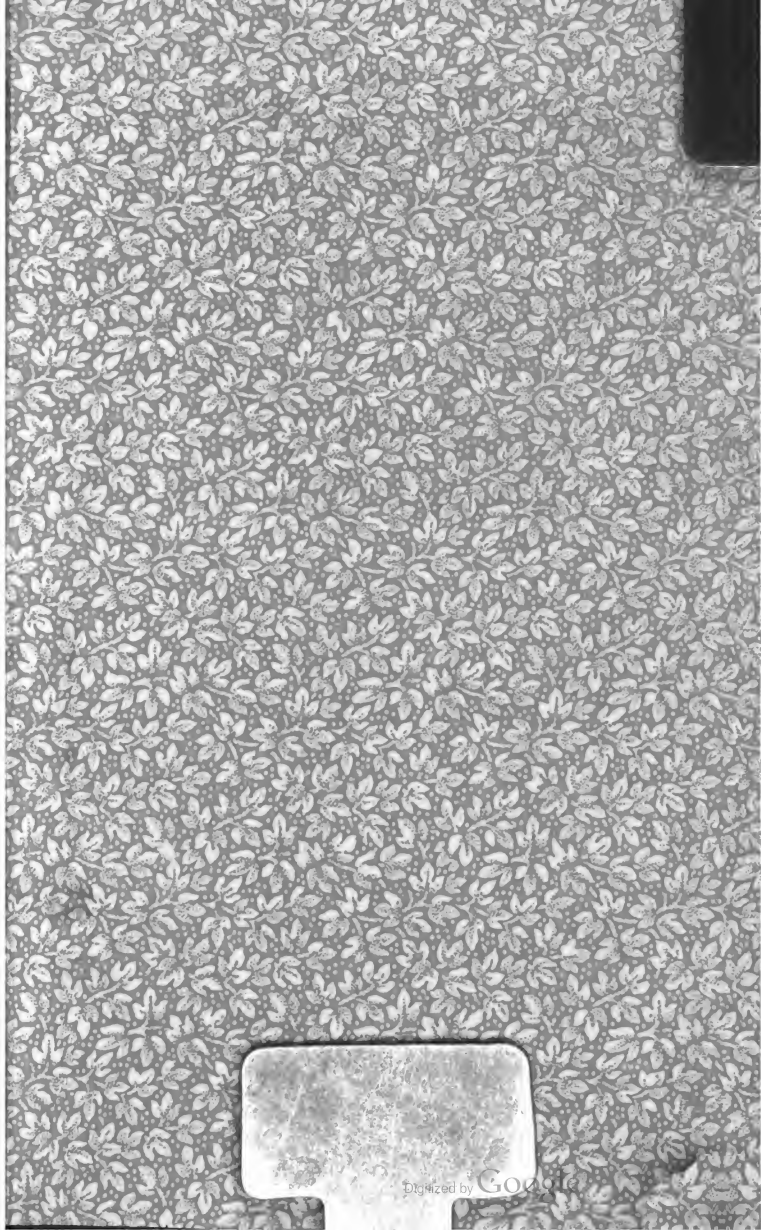
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